

UG118: Blue Gecko *Bluetooth*® Profile Toolkit Developer's Guide



Bluetooth GATT services and characteristics are the basis of the Bluetooth data exchange. They are used to describe the structure, access type, and security properties of the data exposed by a device, such as a heart-rate monitor. Bluetooth services and characteristics have a well-defined and structured format, and they can be easily described using XML mark-up language.

The Profile Toolkit is an XML-based mark-up language for describing the Bluetooth services and characteristics, also known as the GATT database, in both easy human-readable and machine-readable formats. This guide walks you through the XML syntax used in the Profile Toolkit and instructs you how to easily describe your own Bluetooth services and characteristics, configure the access and security properties, and how to include the GATT database as a part of the firmware.

This guide also contains practical examples showing the use of both standardized Bluetooth and vendor-specific proprietary services. These examples provide a good starting point for your own development work.

KEY POINTS

- Understanding Bluetooth GATT profiles, services, characteristics, attribute protocol
- Building the GATT database with the Profile Toolkit



1. Understanding Profiles, Services, Characteristics and the Attribute Protocol

This section gives a basic explanation of Bluetooth profiles, services and characteristics and also explains how the Attribute protocol is used in the data exchange between the GATT server and client. Links to further information regarding these subjects are also provided.

1.1 GATT-Based Bluetooth Profiles and Services

A *Bluetooth* profile specifies the structure in which data is exchanged. The profile defines elements, such as services and characteristics used in a profile, but it may also contain definitions for security and connection-establishment parameters. Typically a profile consists of one or more services which are needed to accomplish a high-level use case, such as heart-rate or cadence monitoring. Standardized profiles allow device and software vendors to build inter-operable devices and applications.

Bluetooth SIG standardized profiles are available at:

https://developer.bluetooth.org/gatt/profiles/Pages/ProfilesHome.aspx.

1.2 Services

A service is a collection of data composed of one or more characteristics used to accomplish a specific function of a device, such as battery monitoring or temperature data, rather than a complete use case.

Bluetooth SIG standardized service specifications are available at:

https://developer.bluetooth.org/gatt/services/Pages/ServicesHome.aspx.

1.3 Characteristics

A characteristic is a value used in a service, either to expose and/or exchange data and/or to control information. Characteristics have a well-defined known format. They also contain information about how the value can be accessed, what security requirements must be fulfilled, and, optionally, how the characteristic value is displayed or interpreted. Characteristics may also contain descriptors that describe the value or permit configuration of characteristic data indications or notifications.

Bluetooth SIG standardized characteristics are available at:

https://developer.bluetooth.org/gatt/characteristics/Pages/CharacteristicsHome.aspx.

1.4 The Attribute Protocol

The Attribute protocol enables data exchange between the GATT server and the GATT client. The protocol also provides a set of operations, namely how to query, write, indicate or notify the data and/or control information between the two GATT parties.

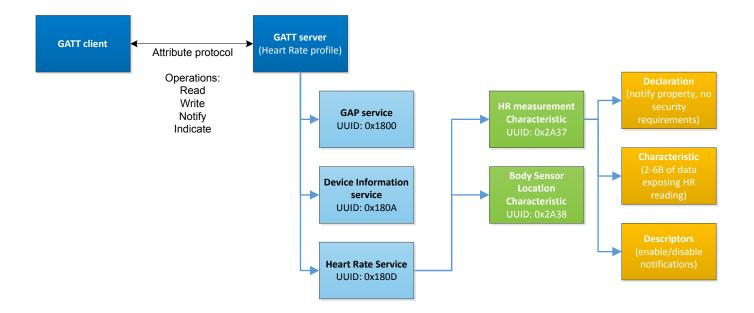


Figure 1.1. Profile, Service, and Characteristic Relationships

Figure 1.2. Attribute Read Operation

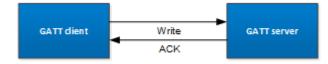


Figure 1.3. Attribute Write Operation



Figure 1.4. Attribute Write without Response Operation

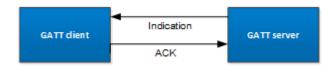


Figure 1.5. Attribute Indicate Operation



Figure 1.6. Attribute Notify Operation

2. Building the GATT Database with Profile Toolkit

This section of the document describes the XML syntax used in the Blue Gecko Bluetooth Profile Toolkit and walks you through the different options you can use when building Bluetooth services and characteristics.

A few practical GATT database examples are also shown.

2.1 General Limitations

The table below shows the limitations of the GATT database supported by the Blue Gecko devices.

Item	Limitation	Notes
Maximum number of characteristics	Not limited; practically restricted by the overall number of attributes in the database	All characteristics which do NOT have the property const="true" are included in this count.
Maximum length of a type="user" characteristic	512 bytes	These characteristics are handled by the application, which means that the amount of RAM available for the application will limit this. If type="user" is not used, then the maximum length of a characteristic is 255 B. Note: Limited by Bluetooth specification
Maximum length of a const="true" characteristic	255 bytes	The amount of free flash available on the device used defines this.
Maximum length of a const="false" characteristic	255 bytes	For every characteristic with the property const="false" RAM will be allocated from the Bluetooth device for storing the characteristic value.
Maximum number of attributes in a single GATT database	255	A single characteristic typically uses 3-5 attributes.
Maximum number of notifiable characteristics	64	
Maximum number of capabilities	16	The logic state of the capabilities will determine the visibility of each service/characteristic.

2.2 <gatt>

The GATT database along with the services and characteristics must be described inside the XML attribute <gatt>.

Parameter	Description
out	Filename for the GATT C source file
	Value: Any UTF-8 string. Must be valid as a filename and end with '.c' Default: gatt_db.c
header	Filename for the GATT C header file
	Value: Any UTF-8 string. Must be valid as a filename and end with '.h'
	Default: gatt_db.h
db_name	GATT database structure name and the prefix for data structures in the GATT C source file.
	Value: Any UTF-8 string; must be valid in C.
	Default: bg_gattdb_data
name	Free text, not used by the database compiler
	Value: Any UTF-8 string
	Default: Nothing
prefix	Prefix to add to each 'id' name for defining the handle macro that can be referenced from the C application.
	Value: Any UTF-8 string. Must be valid in C.
	Default: Nothing
	E.g. If prefix="my_gatt_" and id="temp_measurement" for a particular characteristic, then the following will be generated in the GATT C header file:
	#define my_gatt_temp_measurement X (where X is the handle number for the temp_measurement characteristic)
generic_attribute_service	If it is set to true, Generic Attribute service and its service_changed characteristic will be added in the beginning of the database. The Bluetooth stack takes care of database structure change detection and will send service_changed notifications to clients when a change is detected. In addition, this will enable the GATT-caching feature introduced in Bluetooth 5.1.
	Values:
	true: Generic Attribute service is automatically added to the GATT database and GATT caching is enabled.
	false: Generic Attribute service is not automatically added to the GATT database and GATT caching is disabled.
	Default: false
gatt_caching	The GATT caching feature is enabled by default if generic_attribute_service is set to true. However, it can be disabled by setting this attribute to false.

Example: A GATT database definition.

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8" ?>
<gatt out="my_gatt_db.c" header="my_gatt_db.h" db_name="my_gatt_db_" prefix="my_gatt_"
    generic_attribute_service="true" name="My GATT database">
```

</gatt>

2.3 <capabilities_declare>

The GATT database services and characteristics can be made visible/invisible by using **capabilities**. A capability must be declared in a <capability> element and all capabilities in a GATT database must be first declared in a <capabilities_declare> element consisting of a sequence of <capability> elements. The maximum number of capabilities in a database is 16.

This new functionality does not affect legacy GATT XML databases (prior to Silicon Labs Bluetooth stack version 2.4.x). Because they don't have any capabilities explicitly declared, all services and characteristics will remain visible to a remote GATT client.

Parameter	Description
-	-

Example: Capabilities declaration

<capabilities_declare>

</capabilities_declare>

2.3.1 <capability>

Each capability must be declared individually within a <capabilities_declare> element using the <capability> element. The <capability> element has one attribute named "enable" that indicates the capability's default state at database initialization.

The text value of the <capability> element will be the identifier name for that capability in the generated database C header. Thus, it must be valid in C.

Inheritance of Capabilities

Services and characteristics can declare the capabilities that they want to use. If no capabilities are declared, then the following inheritance rules apply:

- 1. A service that does not declare any capabilities will have all the capabilities from <capabilities_declare> element.
- 2. A characteristic that does not declare any capabilities will have all the capabilities from the service that it belongs to. If the service declares a sub-set of the capabilities in <capabilities declare>, then only that subset will be inherited by the characteristic.
- 3. All attributes of a characteristic inherit the characteristic's capabilities.

Visibility

Capabilities can be enabled/disabled to make services and characteristics visible/invisible to a GATT client according with the following logic:

- 1. A service and all its characteristics are visible when at least one of its capabilities is enabled.
- 2. A service and all its characteristics are invisible when all of its capabilities are disabled.
- 3. A characteristic and all its attributes are visible when at least one of its capabilities is enabled.
- 4. A characteristic and all its attributes are invisible when all of its capabilities are disabled.

Parameter	Description
enable	Sets the default state of a capability at database initialization.
	Values:
	true: Capability is enabled.
	false: Capability is disabled.
	Default: true

Example: Capabilities declaration

```
<capabilities_declare>
    <!-- This capability is enabled by default and the identifier is cap_light -->
    <capability enable="true">cap_light</capability>
    <!-- This capability is disabled by default and the identifier is cap_color -->
    <capability enable="false">cap_color</capability>
</capabilities_declare>
```

2.4 <service>

The GATT service definition is done with the XML attribute **<service>** and its parameters.

The table below describes the parameters that can be used for defining the related values.

Description
Universally Unique Identifier. The UUID uniquely identifies a service. 16-bit values are used for the services defined by the Bluetooth SIG and 128-bit UUIDs can be used for vendor specific implementations.
Range:
0x0000 – 0xFFFF: Reserved for Bluetooth SIG standardized services
0x0000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000 - 0xFFFFFFF-FFF-FFFF-F
The ID is used to identify a service within the service database and can be used as a reference from other services (include statement). Typically this does not need to be used.
Value:
Any UTF-8 string
The type field defines whether the service is a primary or a secondary service. Typically this does not need to be used.
Values:
primary: a primary service
secondary: a secondary service
Default: primary
This field defines if the service UUID is included in the advertisement data.
The advertisement data can contain up to 13 16-bity UUIDs or one (1) 128-but UUID.
Values:
true: UUID included in advertisement data
false: UUID not included in advertisement data
Default: false
Note: You can override the advertisement data with the GAP API, in which case this is not valid.

Example: A Generic Access Profile (GAP) service definition.

```
<!-- Generic Access Service -->
<service uuid="1800">
...
</service>
```

Example: A vendor specific service definition.

```
<!-- A vendor specific service -->
<service uuid="25be6a60-2040-11e5-bd86-0002a5d5c51b">
...
</service>
```

Example: A Heart Rate service definition with UUID included in the advertisement data and ID "hrs".

```
<!-- Heart Rate Service -->
<service uuid="180D" id="hrs" advertise="true">
...
</service>
```

Note: You can generate your own 128-bit UUIDs at: http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-T/asn1/Pages/UUID/uuids.aspx

2.4.1 <capabilities>

A service can declare the capabilities it has with a <capabilities> element. The element consists of a sequence of <capability> elements whose identifiers **must also be part** of the <capabilities_declare> element. The attribute "enable" has no effect in the capabilities declared within this context so it can be excluded.

If a service does not declare any capabilities, it will have all the capabilities from <capabilities_declare> per the inheritance rules.

A service and all its characteristics will be **visible** when **at least one** of its capabilities is **enabled** and **invisible** when **all its capabilities** are **disabled**.

Parameter	Description
-	-

Example: Capabilities declaration

2.4.2 <include>

A service can be included within another service by using the XML attribute <include>.

Parameter	Description
id	ID of the included service
	Value:
	ID of another service

Example: Including Heart Rate service within the GAP service.

2.5 <characteristic>

All the characteristics exposed by a service are defined with the XML attribute **<characteristic>** and its parameters, which must be used inside the **<service>** XML attribute tags.

The table below describes the parameters that can be used for defining the related values.

Parameter	Description
uuid	Universally Unique Identifier. The UUID uniquely identifies a characteristic.
	16-bit values are used for the services defined by the Bluetooth SIG and 128-bit UUIDs can be used for vendor specific implementations.
	Range:
	0x0000 – 0xFFFF: Reserved for Bluetooth SIG standardized characteristics.
	0x0000000-0000-0000-0000-0000000000000
	Reserved for vendor specific characteristics.
id	The ID is used to identify a characteristic. The ID is used within a C application to read and write characteristic values or to detect if notifications or indications are enabled or disabled for a specific characteristic.
	When the project is built the generated GATT C header file contains a macro with the characteristic 'id' and corresponding handle value.
	Value:
	Any UTF-8 string

Example: Adding Device name characteristic into GAP service.

Example: Adding a vendor-specific characteristic into a vendor-specific service with ID.

2.5.1 <capabilities>

A characteristic can declare the capabilities it has with a <capabilities> element. The element consists of a sequence of <capability> elements whose identifiers **must also be declared (or fully inherited)** by the parent service. The attribute "enable" has no effect in the capabilities declared within this context so it can be excluded.

If a characteristic does not declare any capabilities it will have **all the capabilities** from the **service** that it belongs to per the **inheritance rules**. All attributes of a characteristic inherit the characteristic's capabilities.

A characteristic and all its attributes will be **visible** when **at least one** of its capabilities is **enabled** and **invisible** when **all its capabilities** are **disabled**.

Parameter	Description
-	-

Example: Capabilities declaration

2.5.2 cproperties>

The characteristics access and security properties are defined by the XML attribute **roperties> and its parameters, which must be used inside the <characteristic>** XML attribute tags. A characteristic can have multiple properties at the same time.

The table below describes the parameters that can be used for defining the related values.

Parameter	Description
read	Characteristic can be read by a remote device.
	Values:
	true: Characteristic can be read
	false: Characteristic cannot be read
	Default: false
const	Characteristic has a constant value, which cannot be modified after programming.
	The benefit of constant values is that no RAM is allocated for them leaving more RAM to the application.
	Value:
	true: Characteristic value is constant
	false: Characteristic value is not constant
	Default: false
write	Characteristic can be written by a remote device
	Values:
	true: Characteristic can be written
	false: Characteristic cannot be written
	Default: false
write_no_response	Characteristic can be written by a remote device. Write without response is not acknowledged over the Attribute Protocol.
	Values:
	true: Characteristic can be written
	false: Characteristic cannot be written
	Default: false
notify	Characteristic has the notify property and characteristic value changes are notified over the Attribute Protocol. Notifications are not acknowledged over the Attribute Protocol.
	Values:
	true: Characteristic has notify property.
	false: Characteristic does not have notify property.
	Default: false
indicate	Characteristic has the indicate property and characteristic value changes are indicated over the Attribute Protocol. Indications are acknowledged over the Attribute Protocol.
	Values:
	true: Characteristic has indicate property.
	false: Characteristic does not have indicate property.
	Default: false

Parameter	Description
authenticated_read	Reading the characteristic value requires an authentication. In order to read the characteristic with this property the remote device has to be bonded using MITM protection and the connection must be also encrypted.
	Values:
	true: Authentication is required
	false: Authentication is not required
	Default: false
encrypted_read	Reading the characteristic value requires an encrypted link. With iOS 9.1 and newer devices must also be bonded at least with Just Works pairing.
	Values:
	true: Encryption is required
	false: Encryption is not required
	Default: false
bonded_read	Reading the characteristic value requires an encrypted link. Devices must also be bonded at least with Just Works pairing.
	Values:
	true: Bonding and encryption are required
	false: Bonding is not required
	Default: false
authenticated_write	Writing the characteristic value requires an authentication. In order to write the characteristic with this property the remote device has to be bonded using MITM protection and the connection must be also encrypted.
	Values:
	true: Authentication is required
	false: Authentication is not required
	Default: false
encrypted_write	Writing the characteristic value requires an encrypted link. With iOS 9.1 and newer devices must also be bonded at least with Just Works pairing.
	Values:
	true: Encryption is required
	false: Encryption is not required
	Default: false
bonded_write	Writing the characteristic value requires an encrypted link. Devices must also be bonded at least with Just Works pairing.
	Values:
	true: Bonding and encryption are required
	false: Bonding is not required
	Default: false

Parameter	Description
reliable_write	Allows using reliable write procedure to modify attribute, this is just a hint to GATT client. The Bluetooth stack always allows using reliable writes to be used to modify attributes.
	Values:
	true: Reliable write enabled
	false: Reliable write disabled
	Default: false
authenticated_notify	Both enabling notifications/indications on this characteristic and sending out notifications/indications on this characteristic require authentication. In order to enable/disable notifications/indications and to be able to receive notifications/indications the remote device has to be bonded using MITM protection and the connection must be also encrypted. Use this property along with the <i>notify</i> or <i>indicate</i> property.
	Values:
	true: Authentication is required
	false: Authentication is not required
	Default: false
encrypted_notify	Both enabling notifications/indications on this characteristic and sending out notifications/indications on this characteristic require an encrypted link. With iOS 9.1 and newer, devices must also be bonded at least with Just Works pairing. Use this property along with the <i>notify</i> or <i>indicate</i> property.
	Values:
	true: Encryption is required
	false: Encryption is not required
	Default: false
bonded_notify	Both enabling notifications/indications on this characteristic and sending out notifications/indications on this characteristic require an encrypted link. Devices must also be bonded at least with Just Works pairing. Use this property along with the <i>notify</i> or <i>indicate</i> property.
	Values:
	true: Encryption is required
	false: Encryption is not required
	Default: false

Example: Device name characteristic with const and read properties.

Example: Device name characteristic with and read and write properties to allow the value to be modified by the remote device.

Example: Heart Rate Measurement characteristic with notify property.

Example: Characteristic with encrypted read property.

Example: Characteristic with authenticated write property.

Example: Characteristic with authenticated indicate property.

2.5.3 <value>

The data type and length for a characteristic is defined with the XML attribute **<value>** and its parameters, which must be used inside the **<characteristic>** XML attribute tags.

The table below describes the parameters that can be used for defining the related values.

Parameter	Description
length	Defines a fixed length for the characteristic or the maximum length if variable_length is true. If length is not defined and there is a value (e.g. data exists inside <value></value>), then the value length is used to define the length.
	If both <i>length</i> and value are defined, then the following rules apply:
	 If variable_length is false and length is bigger than the value's length, then the value will be padded with 0's at the end to match the attribute's length.
	 If <i>length</i> is smaller than the value's length, then the value will be clipped to match <i>length</i>, regardless of whether <i>variable_length</i> is true or false.
	Range:
	0 – 255: Length in bytes if <i>type</i> is 'hex' or 'utf-8'
	0 – 512: Length in bytes if <i>type</i> is 'user'
	Default: 0
variable_length	Defines that the value is of variable length. The maximum length must also be defined with the <i>length</i> attribute or by defining a value. If both <i>length</i> and value are defined, then the rules decribed in <i>length</i> apply.
	Values:
	true: Value is of variable length
	false: Value has a fixed length
	Default: false
type	Defines the data type.
	Values:
	hex: Value type is hex
	utf-8: Value is a string
	user: When the characteristic type is marked as type="user", the application is responsible for initializing the characteristic value and also providing it, for example, when read operation occurs. The Bluetooth stack does not initialize the value or automatically provide the value when it is being read. When this is set, the Bluetooth stack generates gatt_server_user_read_request or gatt_server_user_write_request , which must be handled by the application.
	Default: utf-8

Example: Heart Rate Measurement characteristic with notify property and fixed length of two (2) bytes.

Example: A variable length vendor specific characteristic with maximum length of 20 bytes.

Example: The value and length of a characteristic can also be defined by typing the actual value inside the <value> tags.

In the example above, the value is "Blue Gecko BGM111" and the length is 17 bytes.

Example: Defining both length and value with length bigger than the value's length.

In the example above, the value will be "01020000" because the *length* is bigger than the value's length and the value gets padded with 0's.

Example: Defining both length and value with length **smaller** than the value's length.

In the example above, the value will be "0102" because the *length* is smaller than the value's length, so the value gets clipped to match the *length*.

2.5.4 <description>

Characteristic user description values are defined with the XML attribute <description>, which must be used inside the <characteristic> XML attribute tags.

Characteristic user description is an optional value, which is exposed to the remote device and can be used, for example, to provide a user-friendly description of the characteristic shown in the application's user interface.

The table below describes the parameters that can be used for defining the related values.

Parameter	Description
_	_

Example: Heart Rate Measurement characteristic with notify property and fixed length of two (2) bytes.

2.5.5 <descriptor>

The XML element <descriptor> can be used to define a generic characteristic descriptor.

Example: Adding a characteristic descriptor with type UUID 2908.

2.6 GATT Examples

Example: A full GAP service with device name and appearance characteristics as constant values with read property.

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8" ?>
<gatt>
    <!-- Generic Access Service -->
    <service uuid="1800">
          <!-- Device name -->
          <characteristic uuid="2a00">
               cproperties read="true" const="true" />
               <value>Blue Gecko</value>
         </characteristic>
         <!-- Appearances -->
          <characteristic uuid="2a01">
               cproperties read="true" const="true" />
               <value type="hex">0768</value>
          </characteristic>
     </service>
</gatt>
```

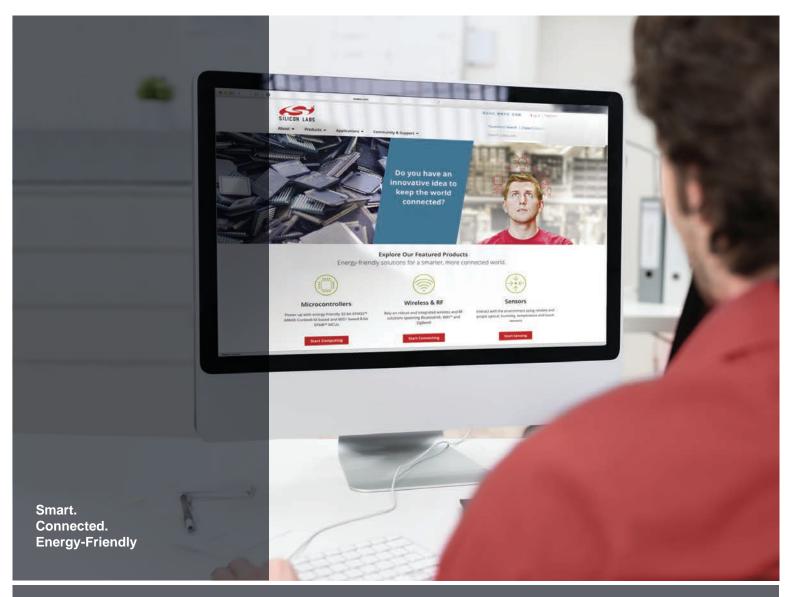
Example: Full Device Information, Immediate Alert, and Link Loss services.

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8" ?>
<gatt>
     <!-- Device Information Service -->
     <service uuid="180A">
          <!-- Manufacturer name string -->
          <characteristic uuid="2A29">
               cproperties read="true" const="true" />
               <value>Silicon Labs</value>
          </characteristic>
          <!-- Model number string -->
          <characteristic uuid="2A24">
               cproperties read="true" const="true" />
               <value>BGM111</value>
          </characteristic>
          <!-- Serial number string -->
          <characteristic uuid="2A23">
               cproperties read="true" const="true" />
               <value type="hex">000780000047</value>
          </characteristic>
     </service>
     <!-- Link Loss Service -->
     <service uuid="1803" advertise="true" >
          <!-- Alert Level -->
          <characteristic uuid="2a06" id="xgatt_lloss">
               cproperties read="true" write="true" />
               <value length="1" />
          </characteristic>
     </service>
     <!-- Immediate Alert Service -->
     <service uuid="1802" advertise="true" >
          <!-- Alert Level -->
          <characteristic uuid="2a06" id="xgatt_alert">
               roperties write_no_response="true" />
               <value length="1" />
          </characteristic>
     </service>
</gatt>
```

Example: GATT database with capabilities

```
<gatt db_name="light_gattdb" out="gatt_db.c" header="gatt_db.h" generic_attribute_service="true">
   <capabilities_declare>
        <capability enable="true">cap_light</capability> <!-- this capability is enabled by default -->
        <capability enable="false">cap_color</capability> <!-- this capability is disabled by default -->
   </capabilities_declare>
    <service uuid="ed15dbd1-7ed7-43ce-8746-26d31c0412a2" id="light_service">
        <capabilities>
            <capability>cap_light</capability>
            <capability>cap_color</capability>
        </capabilities>
        <characteristic uuid="1c8834b9-a69d-427b-b35f-308ba7b7ald5" id="light_control">
           <capabilities>
                <capability>cap_light</capability>
           </capabilities>
            cproperties read="true" write="true" />
            <value type="user"></value>
        </characteristic>
                <characteristic uuid="6d2dede5-91f8-4dd3-8276-dbd967a5ac39" id="color_control"> <!-- this</pre>
characteristic is invisible to remotes by default -->
           <capabilities>
                <capability>cap_color</capability>
            </capabilities>
            cproperties read="true" write="true" />
            <value type="user"></value>
        </characteristic>
   </service>
</gat.t.>
```

- If the capabilities cap_light and cap_color are enabled the entire light_service will be visible
- If the capability cap_light is disabled the characteristic light_control will be invisible
- · If the capability cap_color is disabled the characteristic color_control will be invisible





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